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Kids and Mindfulness: One Nonprofit's Mission to Help Reduce Stress

Mission Be's curriculum is based on evidence-based practices like breath, movement, visualizations, affirmations, sharing circles and silent seated meditation. Seeing how many children are also nature-deprived, some classes, or some parts of the classes, are done outdoors.

By Dr. Joseph Mercola

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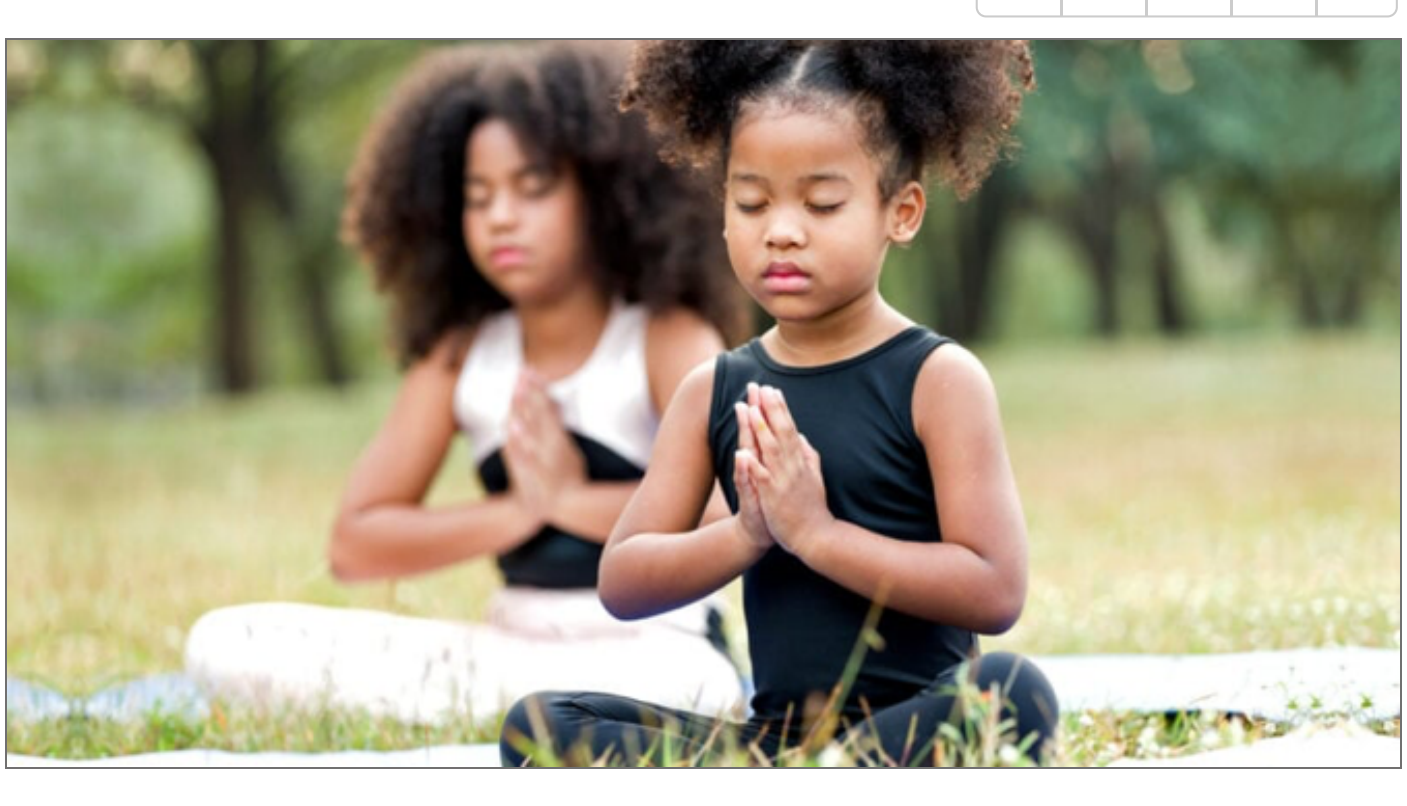

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Story at a glance:

- Mission Be, a nonprofit organization that brings mindfulness into schools, was founded in 2013 by social worker and yoga instructor Carin Winter.
- Mission Be's curriculum is based on evidence-based practices like breath, movement, visualizations, affirmations, sharing circles and silent seated meditation.
- Ideally, meditation is connecting to an expanded state of consciousness. The mindfulness practices taught by Winter can, eventually, result in your being able to maintain a meditative state for most of the day, regardless of where you are or what you're doing.
- Play is a meditative state. The purpose of meditation is to get into a timeless moment where you're not connected to time, where your mind is not focused on the past and the future. Time basically vanishes and you're just in the present moment. Play automatically puts us in the present moment, which is the very definition of mindfulness.
- Playing is also fun, and it's nearly impossible to be stressed and have fun at the same time. In many cases, what children need the most is time to play; to get lost in the "now."

In the video below, I interview Carin Winter, founder and CEO of Mission Be, a nonprofit organization that brings mindfulness into schools.

Mission Be was created in 2013, while Winter was a social worker at Islip High School.

By then, she'd been working with adolescents for 14 years, both in the foster care system and in school settings.

"I worked at Islip for about a decade, and I saw that a lot of our students were really dysregulated, they had an inability to manage their stress," she says. "They had a lot of anxiety, depression and substance abuse. We had an epidemic of heroin go through our school. It was shocking and devastating and we needed a solution.

She continued:

> "As a school social worker, I would see around 120 students a year, and there were 1,200 students in the building. So about 10% of them were getting social work counseling from me and 10% from another social worker.
>
> "The other 80% weren't really getting any mental health support, unless they were getting it outside of the building.
>
> "Also, we were implementing curriculum through the health classes, and our district did the best to bring in good curriculum, but I just wasn't personally satisfied with it. I didn't think that we were teaching the children the skills to self-regulate. So I started a pilot in our high school.
>
> "It was voluntary and 56% of our students signed up voluntarily to participate in this program as an alternative to phys ed twice a week for eight weeks. We collected some data at the end and it was phenomenal.
>
> "The students loved the program. They had reductions in stress, reductions in anxiety, and they really enjoyed themselves.
>
> "So, after launching that pilot, I started working with the elementary schools in my district, although I was not assigned to them. …
>
> "One of my friends was a teacher in an elementary school and she said, 'My kids are so stressed, you have to come help me out.' So I went over there for a few Fridays in a row and within a month I had 17 requests from elementary school teachers to go in their classrooms.
>
> "At the time I owned a yoga studio as a side hustle because educators don't make a lot of money. I recruited about seven yoga teachers that were stay-at-home moms and/or had degrees in social work, psychology and education, and they assisted me in building out this curriculum.
>
> "We went in once a week for eight weeks to these 17 classrooms, and at the end, we had 500 students quietly meditating in the field.
>
> "It was unbelievable. It was the most moving day of my life. It was life-changing. And I knew that that's what I wanted to do rather than stay as a school social worker. …
>
> "We have two separate curriculums, one for middle and high school, and another one for elementary, and within each curriculum it's tiered for academic learning."

M
Dr. Mercola Interviews:
CARIN WINTER
1:00:13

Where Mission Be is today

As the program grew, Winter decided to take a sabbatical from her social work at Islip. She moved to Silicon Valley for a summer, where she got a crash course on how to start a nonprofit.

Over the next six years, she worked with some of the highest-performing schools in Silicon Valley, and some of the lowest-performing schools in the Bay Area.

This year, Mission Be serviced 26 schools in New York and 10 schools in California, providing mindfulness training once a week for several weeks.

Mission Be's curriculum

Mission Be's curriculum is based on evidence-based practices like breath, movement, visualizations, affirmations, sharing circles and silent seated meditation. Each class is 40 minutes.

Typically, the class begins with four to five minutes of gentle stretching, followed by a two- to five-minute guided mindfulness practice, depending on the age of the students.

After that, they do a standing circle share, where students are encouraged to share how they're feeling, something they're grateful for, or something they love about themselves.

Next, the topic of the day's class is introduced. For example, if the topic is gratitude, the concept will be explained, and the science behind it is reviewed in whatever way is age-appropriate.

Then, the students engage in an activity relating to the day's topic. So, for the topic of gratitude, for example, each student will share something they're grateful for. Art activities are also incorporated.

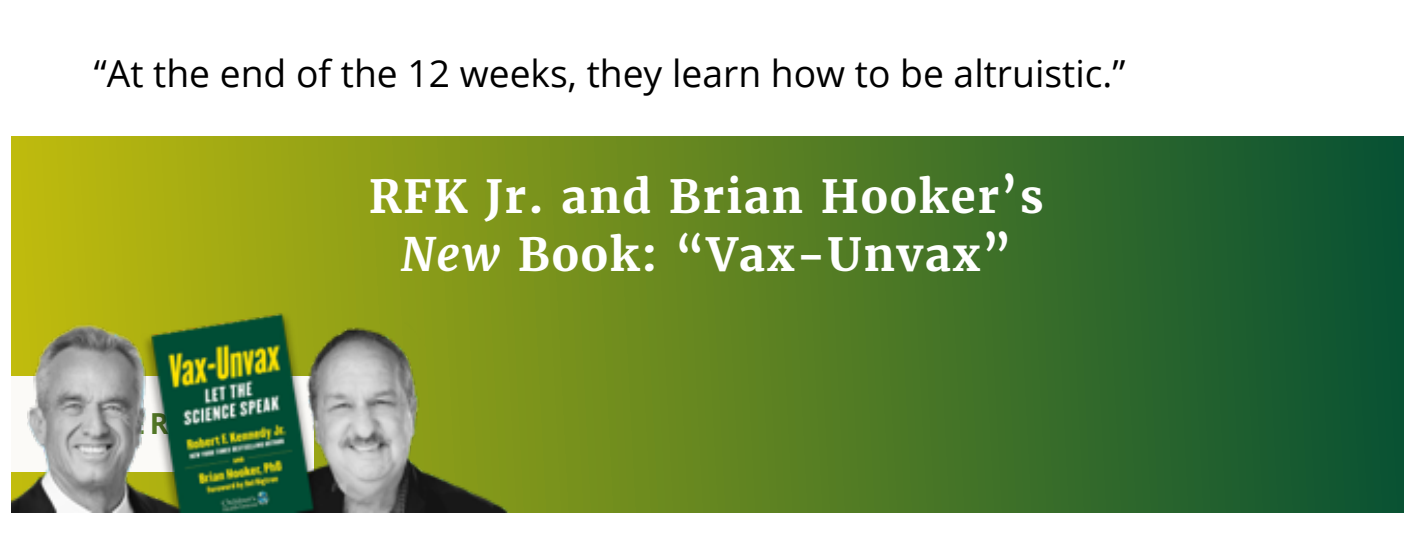
The class ends with a visualization practice and an affirmation. If time allows, they may also play a team-building game before the session ends.

Seeing how many children are also nature-deprived, some classes, or some parts of the classes, are done outdoors. They might take a barefoot mindfulness walk or hug a tree.

Winter continues:

> "Then, they sit down and find something loose in nature, whether it's a blade of grass or a leaf. We sit in a circle and everyone describes, kind of like show and tell, 'this is what I got.'
>
> "And we look at how the leaf is similar to our palm and really give the children a time to integrate and engage in nature. We have about 12 different topics.
>
> "Lesson 1 is about neuroscience. So, we teach the children about the amygdala … the alarm center of the brain.
>
> "So I tell the students, 'If you see a tiger in the jungle, your amygdala is going to go off and you're going to run and hopefully escape this tiger.' But there are no tigers hanging around Islip New York. So there's the paper tiger, right?
>
> "There are state tests, there are deadlines, there's homework. Sometimes our amygdala goes off because we have to stand up and speak in front of the class, and that can cause fear.
>
> "So we can take a deep breath and calm the amygdala. When we do that, it allows our prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for higher-order cognitive functioning and information processing, and our hippocampus, which is responsible for memory, to function better.
>
> "And so the children, even in kindergarten, learn the word amygdala. …
>
> "And as they get older, we teach them a little bit more neuroscience, we teach them about the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system. When you're stressed, you're in a sympathetic state.
>
> "When you're not stressed, you're in a parasympathetic state, and mindfulness is a practice that, the more frequently we practice these breaths, the more we're able to self-regulate, calm down, focus and relax.
>
> "Even kindergartners want to know, why are we doing this? They're fascinated by the neuroscience piece of it. And the neuroscience piece is an important piece for even a young child to understand.
>
> "In lesson 2, we teach them about digital detox, which is part of meditation. Our phones are very disruptive. …
>
> "We don't just lecture them. We talk about the way technology affects us and how it affects our sleep, how it affects our levels of empathy towards one another, how only 2% of people can actually multitask. …
>
> "All the data that shows the importance of being present, of making eye contact. …
>
> "We teach about compassion and empathy and vulnerability. …
>
> "At the end of the 12 weeks, they learn how to be altruistic."

RFK Jr. and Brian Hooker's *New* Book: "Vax-Unvax"



Your health affects your consciousness

An important side note here is that, when you optimize your biology, you radically improve your level of consciousness. People who are not healthy have a decreased ability to do this.

This, I believe, is one of the reasons we're seeing this devolution in the youth of this country because their health is undermined in so many ways.

So, when it comes to expanding your consciousness, optimizing your health is really agenda item No. 1. Obviously, this is not within the scope of Winter's work, but I want to mention it because it's important to understand.

Winter has seen this at work as well. Children living in group homes are fed by the state, and the food is just terrible. On top of that, most can end up on multiple psychiatric drugs.

She saw good results when teaching mindfulness in group homes, but there's no doubt effects are optimized when the children are fed a good wholesome diet.

Play is a meditative state of expanded consciousness

Ideally, meditation is connecting to an expanded state of consciousness. The good news is that the types of mindfulness practices taught by Winter can, eventually, result in being able to maintain a meditative state for most of the day, regardless of where you are or what you're doing.

It's also important to recognize that play is a meditative state. The purpose of meditation is to get into this timeless moment where you're not connected to time, where your mind is not focused on the past and the future. Time basically vanishes and you're just in the present moment.

Play automatically puts us in the present moment, which is the very definition of mindfulness. Of course, playing is also fun, and it's nearly impossible to be stressed and have fun at the same time. So, in many cases, what children need the most is time to play; to get lost in the "now."

Children who are taught and encouraged to maintain a playful attitude can basically learn to remain in a meditative state for most of the day. We can also learn to do this as adults. "Play" doesn't mean running around and being rambunctious. It's also a joyful creative state.

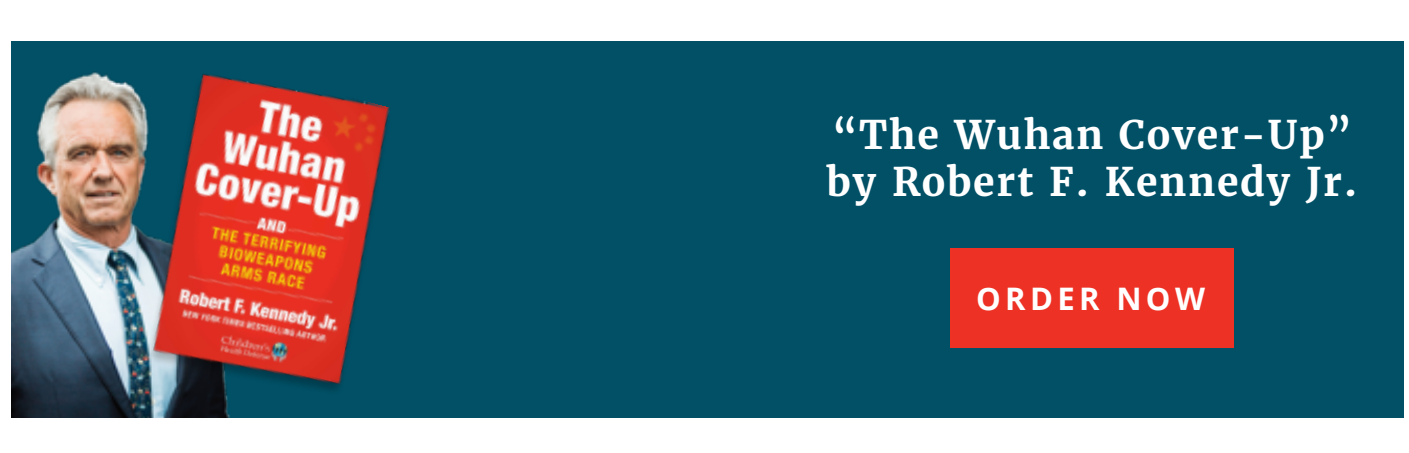
So, when you're creating, you're playing, you're in a mindful state, and in a higher state of consciousness. That, in turn, creates a positive feedback loop, in an expanded state of consciousness (sometimes referred to as "being in the zone") that allows you to "tap into" or "download" new ideas, some of which can turn out to be quite profitable.

Tapping into the divine

Meditation can also allow you to tap into the divine or a state of unconditional love.

Winter shares the following story highlighting this:

> "I had just started Mission Be. I was working in an elementary school … and we did a meditation and talked about Mr. Miyagi from 'Karate Kid,' because they were reading the book, 'Karate Kid.'
>
> "I talked about Mr. Miyagi and how he's embodied. He's a small dude, but he can chop through concrete. The power of his mind connected with the strength of his body …
>
> "From that discussion, we did a meditation. I said, 'I want you to envision someone there with you in your meditation that you love and admire and look up to.' I was playing Enya and all the children had their eyes closed. All of a sudden I felt this sense of divine grace in the room.
>
> "I looked around and four of the 20 kids had tears rolling down their faces. Not like sobbing, like an adult would have, but just rolling down their face. I looked at the teacher and she had tears.
>
> "And I'm just saying, 'Imagine you're on a beautiful beach. You're there with someone you love and care about, a mentor, teacher, someone you trust, and imagine that they're sending you unconditional love.'
>
> "When we opened our eyes, this little girl raised her hand and said, 'Ms. Winter, I felt my uncle that died.' And this other girl goes, 'I felt my grandpa.' And then this boy goes, 'I saw God's face.' …
>
> "So it was fascinating. I was so moved by that moment. I said, this supersedes psychology. They're tuning into a higher force. They're tuning into God and the angels. It was so beautiful, and I didn't initiate that. It just happened, and I felt that grace come through.
>
> "So, that's the type of consciousness we're opening up to. And I think that children have an innate ability to be intuitive. They have very powerful gut instincts. Their prefrontal cortex is still developing until they're 25, but their gut instinct is probably stronger than ours."



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How mindfulness impacts your mental health

A woman at Stanford University wrote her undergraduate senior thesis on the Mission Be program. Data collection reveals the program results in radical improvements in mood.

In one small cohort study of 26 children, 22 began the program in a negative state, feeling frustrated, angry or upset. By the end of the 12-week program, only one still felt unhappy, two felt "OK," and the 23 remaining were in a positive emotional state.

"Social-emotional learning has to be an integrative part of the curriculum," Winter says.

She continues:

> "If we want to improve well-being, consciousness, social and emotional health and mental health, really, it has to be taught to the student. …
>
> "I think our children, just in general, need more joy. Also, children have so many mirroring neurons. They have around twice as many mirroring neurons that [adults] have, so they learn from our behavior. So, if a teacher is dysregulated, they're going to pick up on that and they're going to be dysregulated.
>
> "The parents are fearful. During the pandemic, a lot of people were in fear and anxiety, and our children felt that. And so, that's why it's so important to regulate your own stress.
>
> "Forget about teaching mindfulness to your kids. Spend a year just learning it yourself. …
>
> "Because a dysregulated parent is going to mean a dysregulated child, because they're picking up on their parents' emotional state and well-being."

Training for teachers

The same goes for teachers, which is why Mission Be also offers training for teachers.

Winter explains:

> "The No. 1 thing you can do to teach mindfulness to children is just to learn it yourself, because they're going to mirror you. So, we train teachers. We have [three] models. One model is we go into schools and teach once a week, for anywhere from four to 32 weeks.
>
> "The second model is we do online training for teachers. …
>
> "We teach them all 12 lessons, and we give them videos and they get short practices alongside of that.
>
> "The other thing is, we just opened our first Mission Be office, and we've been in business for 10 years, right in Islip, New York, and we do mindful one-on-ones with families, parents, teachers — anyone who needs it, any member of the community.
>
> "So those are our three models. And then we have online recordings that folks can access nationally and internationally for free on how to teach simple meditation practices."

Most of Mission Be's work is currently being done on Long Island in Suffolk and Nassau County, New York, as well as Silicon Valley, San Mateo and Santa Clara County in California, but they've done trainings all over the country.

"Anyone who wants us to come help them, we're there," she says.

For more information, check out Mission Be's website at missionbe.org, or follow them on Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube.

Originally published by Mercola.

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Dr. Joseph Mercola
Dr. Joseph Mercola is the founder of Mercola.com.

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Corrina
4 days ago
I think this is what more of our students need. Social emotional regulation is vital to successful outcomes. If a child is not regulated, stressed or anxious they're not even accessible to learning. Teaching children at a young age about emotions, what strategies they can use to calm their bodies and learning how to play and be present in the moment are all important life skills that will help make them more productive adults.
2 0 Reply • Share ›

> **Carin** → Corrina
> 3 days ago
> Thank you Corrina! I agree. We appreciate your support!
>
> With care,
> Carin Winter
> 2 0 Reply • Share ›

Kim
5 days ago
This is not good for our children, it's disturbing to me as a Catholic. Do your homework, Yoga is from the diabolic. It is against church teaching. I wish people weren't so far removed from the teaching of the one true apostolic faith that our Lord left the keys to Peter.
It's s wonder why this world is so far gone.
Poor kids!!
3 3 Reply • Share ›

> **Carin** → Kim
> 3 days ago
> Hello Kim,
>
> How are you? I understand your concerns. I wouldn't want children learning anything in schools that is religious. However, Mission Be's program is not at all teaching any traditional yoga or anything eastern. It's basically breathing and stretching. We don't use yoga language or symbols. We don't even call it yoga in schools we call it mindful movement.
>
> On a personal level, I am Catholic as well. I contribute to my church generously and have also volunteered. I am a Godmother to 4 Godchildren. I personally meditated this morning to the song "The Goodness of God" by CC Williams.
>
> There are many other organizations teaching yoga and meditation that is Buddhist and Hindu in public schools in California for example with mantras etc. We would not ever teach any religion in a public school. As an organization, believe in the separation of church and state. Personally if I had a child who was taught a mantra or religious yoga in schools I would be very upset!
>
> I can promise you that although I respect all faiths, I practice mine and Mission Be
>
> see more
> 2 0 Reply • Share ›

LinUK
5 days ago
What a good idea! **NOT**. Take already confused and messed up kids and introduce them to a false religion that will lead them into even greater confusion and bondage.
How about allowing evangelists into the schools to lead them to the only One who can make them free and save their souls? The Lord Jesus Christ.
Luke 17:2 It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.
1 2 Reply • Share ›

> **Carin** → LinUK
> 3 days ago
> Hi linUK
>
> How are you? I can assure you that Mission Be is not teaching anything religious in schools. I understand your concerns. I wouldn't want children learning anything in schools that is religious. However, Mission Be's program is not at all teaching any traditional yoga or anything eastern. It's basically breathing and stretching. We don't use yoga language or symbols. We don't even call it yoga in schools we call it mindful movement.
>
> As I shared with Kim above… on a personal level, I am Catholic as well. I contribute to my church generously and have also volunteered. I am a Godmother to 4 Godchildren. I personally meditated this morning to the song "The Goodness of God" by CC Williams.
>
> There are many other organizations teaching yoga and meditation that is Buddhist and Hindu in public schools in California for example with mantras etc. We would not ever teach any religion in a public school. As an organization, believe in the separation of church and state. Personally if I had a child who was taught a mantra or religious yoga in schools I would be very upset!
>
> see more
> 2 0 Reply • Share ›

Susan
5 days ago
Yoga is Hinduism. As a Christian, I would never allow my child to participate in this practice.
1 2 Reply • Share ›

> **Carin** → Susan
> 3 days ago
> Hi Susan,
>
> How are you? I hope all is well. I understand, I'm sharing my edited comments above here for your review.
>
> Thanks so much!
>
> With gratitude and care,
>
> ….I am Carin, the ceo of Mission Be and also Catholic. I personally I wouldn't want children learning anything in schools that is religious. However, Mission Be's program is not at all teaching any traditional yoga or anything eastern. It's basically breathing and stretching. We don't use yoga language or symbols. We don't even call it yoga in schools we call it mindful movement.
>
> There are many other organizations teaching yoga and meditation that is Buddhist and Hindu in public schools in California for example with mantras etc. We would not ever teach any religion in a public school. As an organization, believe in the separation of church and state. Personally if I had a child who was taught a
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